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OLD FORT MOORE

BY J. M. GUINN.

(Part of an address delivered July 4, 1897, at the semi-centennial of the first Fourth of July celebration in California.)

It is an historical fact, but one that seems to be unknown to writers of California history, that there were two forts planned and partially built upon Fort Hill, in Los Angeles, during the war for the conquest of California. The first was planned by Lieut. William H. Emory, topographical engineer of Gen. Kearney's staff, and work begun upon it by Commodore Stockton's sailors and marines. The second was planned by Lieut. J. W. Davidson of the First United States Dragoons, and was built by the Mormon Battalion. The first was not completed and was not named. The second was named Fort Moore. Their location seems to have been identical. The first was designed to hold 100 men, the second was much larger. A brief review of some of the events preceding the building of the fort will not be out of place.

After the defeat of the Californians under Gens. Flores and Andres Pico at the battles of Paso de Bartolo and La Mesa, on the 8th and 9th of January, 1847, the American forces under Stockton and Kearney marched into the city and took possession of it.

Lieut. Emory says: "Not altogether trusting to the honesty of Gen. Flores, who had once before broken his parole, we moved into town in line of battle. (The city, under flag of truce, had been surrendered by a committee of citizens to Commodore Stockton.) It was a wise precaution, for the streets were full of drunken fellows, who brandished their arms and saluted us with every term of reproach. The crest of the hill overlooking the town, in rifle range, was covered with horsemen engaged in the same hospitable manner. Our men marched steadily on until crossing the ravine leading into the public square (the plaza) when a fight took place among the Californians on the hill. One became disarmed and, to avoid death, rolled down the hill toward us, his adversary pursuing and lancing him in the most cold-blooded manner. The man tumbling

down the hill was supposed to be one of our vaqueros, and the cry was raised ‘rescue him!’ The crew of the Cyane, nearest the scene, at once and without orders halted and gave the man that was landing him a volley. Strange to say, he did not fall.” The commodore gave the jack tars a cursing, not so much for firing without orders as for their bad marksmanship.

Shortly after the above episode the Californians did open fire from the hill on the vaqueros in charge of the cattle. (These vaqueros were Californians in the employ of the Americans, and were regarded by their countrymen as traitors.) A company of riflemen was ordered to clear the hill. A single volley effected this, killing two of the enemy. This was the last blood shed in the war; and the second conquest of California was completed as the first had been, by the capture of Los Angeles. Two hundred men with two pieces of artillery were stationed on the hill.

The Angelenos did not exactly welcome the invaders with “bloody hands to inhospitable graves,” but they did their best to let them know they were not wanted. The better class of the native inhabitants closed their houses and took refuge with foreign residents or went to the ranchos of their friends in the country. The fellows of the baser sort who were in the possession of the city exhausted their vocabularies of abuse on the invading gringos.

There was one paisano who excelled all his countrymen in this species of warfare. It is a pity his name has not been preserved in history with that of other famous scolds and kickers. He rode by the side of the advancing column up Main street firing volleys of invective and denunciation at the hated gringos. At certain points in his tirade he worked himself up to such a pitch of indignation that language failed him, then he would solemnly go through the motions of “make ready; take aim,” with an old shotgun he carried, but when it came to the order “fire!” discretion got the better of his valor; he lowered his gun and began again firing invective at the gringo soldiers; his mouth would go off if his gun would not.

Commodore Stockton’s headquarters were in the Abila House, the second house on Gracia street, north of the Plaza. The building is still standing, but has undergone many changes in fifty years.

An amusing account was recently given me by an old pioneer of how Commodore Stockton got possession of the house. The widow

Abila and her daughters, at the approach of the Americans, had abandoned their home and taken refuge with Don Luis Vignes of the Aliso. Vignes was a Frenchman and friendly to both sides. The widow had left a young Californian in charge of her house, which was finely furnished, with strict orders to keep it closed. Stockton had with him a fine brass band, probably the best ever heard in California. When the troops halted on the Plaza the band began to play. The boyish guardian of the Abila Casa could not resist the temptation to open the door and look out. The strains of music drew him to the Plaza. Stockton and his staff, passing by, found the door invitingly open, entered and took possession. The recreant watchman returned when the band ceased to play to find himself dispossessed and the house in the hands of the enemy.

Flores' army was supposed to be hovering around the city, and Stockton determined to fortify. On January 11, Lieut. Emory says: "I was ordered to select a site and place a fort capable of containing a hundred men. With this in view, a rapid reconnaissance of the town was made, and the plan of a fort sketched; so placed as to enable a small garrison to command the town and the principal avenues to it. The plan was approved. January 12, I laid off the work, and before night broke ground." The sailors and marines were detailed by companies to work on the fort, "which work," the lieutenant says, "they performed bravely and gave me great hopes of success." On the 14th, Fremont with his battalion arrived from Cahuenga. There were then about one thousand troops in the city, and the old ciudad put on military airs. On the 18th, Kearney, having quarreled with Stockton about who should be Governor of the conquered territory, left for San Diego, taking with him Lieut. Emory and other members of his staff. Emory was sent East by way of Panama, with dispatches. Stockton appointed Col. Fremont Governor, and Col. Russel of the battalion, Secretary of State of the newly-acquired territory, and then took his departure for San Diego, where his ship, the Congress, was lying. The sailors and marines, on the 20th, took up their line of march to San Pedro to rejoin their ships, and work on the fort was abandoned. Lieut. Emory, in a footnote to his published diary, says "Subsequently to my leaving the Ciudad de Los Angeles, the entire plan of the fort was changed, and I am not the projector of the work finally adopted for defense of that town."

Fremont's battalion was left in charge of the city. The Governor had established his headquarters in the Bell Block, corner of Aliso and Los Angeles streets, that being the finest building in the city. Just before the arrival of Col. Cooke's Mormon Battalion, Capt. Owens, in command of Fremont's battalion, moved it with ten pieces of artillery to the Mission San Gabriel. Col. Cooke was an adherent of Gen. Kearney's, and Owens was a friend of Fremont. The removal was made probably to avoid unpleasantness between the two commanding officers.

The quarrel for superiority between Stockton, Kearney, Fremont and Mason continued, and waxed hotter. Kearney had removed to Monterey, and Col. Cooke with his Mormon Battalion had arrived and been stationed at San Luis Rey. On March 12, Col. Cooke thus defines the situation: "Gen. Kearney is supreme somewhere up the coast; Col. Fremont is supreme at Los Angeles; Commodore Shubrick, the same at Monterey, and I at San Luis Rey; and we are all supremely poor, the government having no money and no credit, and we hold the territory because Mexico is the poorest of all."

On March 23 the Mormon battalion arrived in Los Angeles. Fremont's battalion was mustered out, and the artillery removed to Los Angeles. Fremont shortly afterward left for Monterey to report to Kearney, who had established his claim to the Governorship, and then returned to St. Louis. Col. P. St. George Cooke was in command of the southern military district. On the 20th of April rumors reached the city that the Mexican general, Bustamente, was advancing on California with a force of 1500 men.

"Positive information," writes Col. Cooke, "was received that the Mexican government had appropriated \$600,000 toward fitting out this force." It was also reported that cannon and military stores had been landed at San Vicente, in Lower California, just below the line, and that the Californians were preparing for an insurrection. Precautions were taken against a surprise. A troop of dragoons was sent to Warner's Rancho to patrol the Sonora road as far as the desert. "The construction of a fort on the hill fully commanding the town, which had been previously determined upon, was begun, and a company of infantry was posted on the hill."

On the 23rd of April, three months after work had ceased on Emory's fort, the construction of the second fort was begun, and pushed

vigorously. Rumors came thick and fast of the approach of the enemy. On May 3, Col. Cooke writes: "A report was received through the most available sources of information, that Gen. Bustamente had crossed the gulf near the head in boats of the pearl fishers, and at last information was at a rancho on the western road, 70 leagues below San Diego." Col. Stevenson's regiment of New York Volunteers had arrived in California and two companies of it had been sent to Los Angeles. The report that Col. Cooke had received reinforcement and that the place was fortified was supposed to have frightened Bustamente and his invading army into abandoning the recapture of Los Angeles.

On May 13, Col. Cooke was superseded by Col. J. B. Stevenson, in command of the southern military district. Work still continued on the fort. As work on it approached completion, Col. Stevenson was exercised about a suitable flag staff for his field works. He wanted one at least 150 feet high. There was no tall timber in the vicinity of Los Angeles. A contract was let to a native of California, Juan Ramirez, to bring timber from the San Bernardino Mountains of a suitable length to make a flag pole. Juan Ramirez, with a number of carretas, a small army of Indian laborers and an escort of ten Mormon soldiers to protect him against the mountain Indians, repaired to the headwaters of Mill Creek in the mountains, where he found suitable timber. He brought down two tree trunks, one about ninety feet and the other seventy-five to eighty feet long, fastened on the axles of a dozen old carretas, each trunk drawn by twenty yoke of oxen and an Indian driver to each ox. The carpenters among the volunteers spliced the timbers and fashioned a beautiful pole 150 feet long, which was raised in the rear of the field work, near what is now the southeast corner of North Broadway and Rock street, or Fort Moore Place.

By the 1st of July work had so far progressed on the fort that Col. Stevenson decided to dedicate and name it on the Fourth. He issued an official order for the celebration of the anniversary of the birthday of American independence at this post, as he called Los Angeles.

The following is a synopsis of the order:

"At sunrise a Federal salute will be fired from the field work on the hill which commands this town, and for the first time from this point the American standard is displayed.

"At 10 o'clock every soldier at this post will be under arms. The

detachment of the Seventh Regiment N. Y. Volunteers, and First Regiment, U. S. Dragoons (dismounted,) will be marched to the field work on the hill, when, together with the Mormon Battalion, the whole will be formed at 11 o'clock a.m. into a hollow square, when the Declaration of Independence will be read. At the close of this ceremony the field works will be dedicated and appropriately named, and at 12 o'clock a national salute will be fired.

"The field work at this post having been planned and the work conducted entirely by Lieut. Davidson of the First Dragoons, he is requested to hoist upon it for the first time, on the morning of the 4th, the American standard.

"It is the custom of our country to confer on its fortifications the name of some distinguished individual who has rendered important services to his country, either in the councils of the nation or on the battlefield. The commandant has therefore determined, unless the Department of War shall otherwise direct, to confer upon the field work erected at the post of Los Angeles the name of one who was regarded by all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance as a perfect specimen of an American officer, and whose character, for every virtue and accomplishment that adorns a gentleman, was only equaled by the reputation he had acquired in the field for his gallantry as an officer and soldier, and his life was sacrificed in the conquest of this territory at the battle of San Pasqual. The commander directs that from and after the 4th inst. it shall bear the name of Moore."

(It was named after Capt. Benjamin D. Moore of the First United States Dragoons.)

The fort was never entirely completed. On the 15th of July the Mormon Battalion was mustered out of service and work on the fort ceased.

It was located along what is now the easterly line of North Broadway at its intersection of Rock street, directly in front of the High School building. It extended southerly from near the north-easterly line of Dr. Wills's lot across Rock street to about the middle of the fourth lot south of Rock street—or Fort Moore Place—a distance of nearly four hundred feet.

It was not inclosed in the rear. It was a strong position, and two hundred men (about its capacity) could have held it against a thousand if attacked from the front, but its defenders could easily have been outflanked. In the rear of the fortifications was a deep ravine extending from the cemetery diagonally down across North Hill street, and the block between Hill street and Fort street, or Broad-

way, and crossing Temple street at New High street, it came out on Spring street south of the Allen Block. For many years the only road to the old cemetery led up the bottom of this ravine. Many an old-timer has been carried to his last resting place up the cemetery ravine. It was called the Cañada de Los Muertos—the Cañon of the Dead. During the occupation of Los Angeles by the United States troops in 1847, there were frequent rumors of impending insurrections. One of these was the indirect cause of a serious catastrophe and loss of life. On the afternoon of December 7, 1847, an old lady called upon Col. Stevenson and informed him that a large body of Californians had secretly organized and fixed upon that night for a general uprising to capture the city and massacre the garrison. The information was supposed to be reliable. Precautions were taken against a surprise. The guard was doubled and a strong reserve stationed at the guardhouse, which stood on the hill-side in the rear of the St. Elmo, about where Beaudry's stone wall is now. A piece of artillery was kept at the guardhouse. About midnight one of the outpost pickets saw, or thought he saw, a horseman approaching him. He challenged, but receiving no reply, fired. The guard at the caurtel formed to repel an attack. Investigation proved the picket's horseman to be a cow. The guard was ordered to break ranks. One of the cannoneers had lighted a port fire (a sort of fuse formerly used for firing cannon.) He was ordered to extinguish it and return it to the armchest. He stamped out the fire and threw the fuse into the chest filled with ammunition. A spark rekindled and a terrific explosion followed that shook the city like an earthquake. The guardhouse was blown to pieces and the roof timbers thrown into Main street. The wildest confusion reigned. The long roll sounded and the troops flew to arms. Four men were killed by the explosion and ten or twelve wounded, several quite seriously.

After peace was declared in 1848, the old fort was abandoned and it fell to ruins. The Historical Society some fourteen years ago, when the land belonged to the city, made an effort to secure its site for a historical building and museum. Although the land had but little value then, the Mayor and City Council were too short-sighted to grant the society's request. The site was sold for a few hundred dollars, and the old fort became one of our lost landmarks.

The regular army officers stationed here fifty years ago all attained high rank in the civil war. Lieut.-Col. Cooke and Lieuts. A. J. Smith, Stoneman, Emory and Davidson were made major-generals. Lieut. Davidson's original plan contemplated the erection of another fort on the south side of the hill now known as Mt. Lookout, and also the cutting away of a jutting point of Fort Hill that interfered with the range of his guns, but these projects were abandoned.